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AUTHOR	Perryman, Bruce C.
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ABSTRACT

Education is today a recognized social and economic necessity. Increasing demand for career education is putting enormous pressure on educational institutions--elementary, secondary, private, profit, nonprofit, and higher. Problem areas are: career education program expansion, career education's dilemma (because it is not a recognizable part of the education structure), a vertical structure for career education, improving the education program, and the influence of career education on the educational curriculum (the increasing dichotomy between college preparatory and vocational education which must be destroyed). Public school programs, colleges, and universities must become recognized as an integral part of the career education system which provides opportunity for all people. (NH)

Mountain-Plains Education & Economic Development Program, Inc.

POST OFFICE BOX 3078 · GLASGOW, MONTANA 59231 · TEL: (406) 524-6221

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EDUCATION'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR CAREER EDUCATION

Prepared by: Bruce C. Perryman

President/Executive Director

Mountain-Plains Education & Economic Development Program, Inc.

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EDUCATION'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR CAREER EDUCATION

Education is today a recognized social and economic necessity. Every able person is encouraged directly and indirectly to pursue a program of studies that will prepare him for life and work. Increasing demand for career education is putting enormous pressure on public institutions -- elementary, secondary, private, profit, non-profit and higher education. Business and industry are putting pressure on educational agencies to provide a strong base of career education that will prepare the person for work and living. We have, indeed, reached a point where the practical/useful - work oriented education - is the dominant influence in all education, (i.e., career education).

The emphasis throughout the entire education system should be on "performance" – meaning accomplishment. Almost every major curriculum "improvement" in recent years has been evaluated in terms of increased student achievement levels. To suggest that this trend should even be questioned is to invite the wrath of the educational community. Education, both private and public (profit and non-profit), we are told, is our greatest economic and social asset; everything possible must be done to increase the services provided for people interested in education.

It is not necessary to question the value of education for those individuals who ultimately reach the degree and diploma levels. Currently this represents about 20% of each age group, although not necessarily the top 20% in terms of ability. The real cause for concern is the increasing rigidity of the system which already rejects thousands of able people, leaving them with only a general education and with little or no preparation for today's and tomorrow's technological society -- in which they are expected to become productive useful citizens. If the educational community is to maintain the position of leadership it once held in our society, it must encourage and assist the development of career education services. We simply cannot long tolerate an educational system that leaves a majority of its able people working in occupations far below their capacity. It should be understood that unemployment is a continual problem. Education per se may not be a panacea. The degree to which unemployment exists can be interdicted - by career education.

Career Education Program Expansion

On the surface it would appear that career education concepts are expanding rapidly across the country. While this expansion is encouraging, it does not at present, represent a major shift in educational thinking or educational policy. It is in the secondary and post secondary education area -- the intermediate level between junior high school and beyond, commonly called technical

education -- that some of our most serious manpower shortages exist. The projected expansion in post secondary career education services will fall far short of meeting manpower needs in many occupations. Likewise both the non-profit and profit motivated educational institutions are filling a big gap for those persons who have been educationally misplaced or mishandled by public educational institutions.

Career Education's Dilemma

The concept of career education has not yet found a permanent place in the public education system. For one, there is a common misconception that all degreed education is less than sufficient, that being occupational in purpose, it does not require college ability. But the educational requirements for success as an engineering or science technician are clearly beyond the secondary education level. These occupations, as well as many others in the fields of business, health, and agriculture, now require additional study beyond secondary education. It follows, then, that career education must be of concern to the entire educational community, no matter what kind of institutions provide the programs. Unfortunately, colleges and university administrators have shown little interest in the non-baccalaureate education; many are openly hostile toward such programs because of their competition for public funds. It is the "tail wagging the dog" concept in motion.

Career Education, as represented by community education programs (i.e., community colleges, adult education, etc.), is caught in the squeeze primarily because it is not a recognizable part of the education structure. It should be obvious that support for an expanded program of career education will not be obtained until something happens to force a change in the public thinking. Social and economical stresses may become so great that the public, recognizing the gap in our educational system, will lose its present enthusiasm for "general", "academic", "vocational", "college prep", and "higher" education and demand a better balanced system -- a comprehensive system. Hopefully, the educational community will recognize its responsibility and move to make the career education the integral system.

It is well known that those individuals who graduate from a four year college program represent only a relatively small percentage of the able persons in our present social and economic system. The primary requisites for a traditional "college education" are time, money, verbal, computational, social skills, and persistence. Many capable individuals find themselves blocked because they do not fit this pattern for one or more reasons. Often this is due to lack of interest in so called "academic" studies. Some must work to support themselves. Instead of penalizing these

individuals, (which benefits no one) education should recognize their interests and abilities and design an open ended system of career education with entry and exit points at several levels. Until this is accomplished we will continue to lose the talents of many capable people at all age levels.

A Vertical Structure for Career Education

Eventually, a national trend toward a more democratic education system will force a relaxing of the present rigid education structure. When this occurs, a vertical structure of career education will be developed to enable persons to obtain education at the level of his or her ability without being penalized. Today the lack of such structure is the greatest deterrent of the viable career education system. There exists today a deeply rooted educational philosophy that any education not easily recognized as part of a degreed program (college prep) is really not educationally respectable. This influence exists from the elementary education level through the higher educational levels, with the result that approximately 80% of the public education effort is college and university degree oriented. It seems inevitable that a vertical structure of career education will be developed to integrate the present inadequate "academic" structure - thereby creating a comprehensive career education system for all people to benefit from.

It is important to understand that many able persons are counseled out of specialized occupational education programs at present precisely because they do not lead to the baccalaureate level degrees. The endless argument that every course taken for "college credit" should be transferable to a baccalaureate degree program is deeply rooted in the minds of most every counselor and many educators. Unfortunately, the universal interpretation of this argument is that the first years of college should be generalized to provide a base for specialized education in upper division and graduate course. As a direct result of this philosophy, many people enter college, enroll in a conventional program, become thoroughly bored, and drop out after one or two semesters of work. Many more do not consider college because they have little interest in so called academic study. There is much evidence that within these two groups of people who leave the education system are persons who, given an opportunity to study in their field of interest, would be fully capable of completing the requirements of a degree. The very least that could happen would be for them to obtain employment based on their education -- even higher education despite its "ivory tower" approach to education has as an end result - employment. No one studies just to continue his life at studying - even though the proverbial rhetoric is continually paid lip service by many. People study to eventually gain employment, make a living, and generate a life style.

Improving the Education Program

The influence of education's rigid structure has hampered the development of the career education system. Curriculum planners in educational institutions have been reluctant to develop programs with the necessary instructional content because they do not lead to "college" graduation programs. Maybe if they led to employment, a positive result would take place. Frequently a compromise is made by combining occupational with traditional general instruction. Too often, this compromise weakens the program to such an extent that it has little appeal to the very persons it should attract. A planned, integrated system of education designed for all persons -- such as is being generated via the career education concepts and modules currently emerging should provide an answer.

One of the ways in which educators can encourage the development of high quality career education in an institution is to develop integrated curriculums. Do away with the dichotomies and tracking in education and provide a system of education for people so they can live, work, play and progress. These curriculums should be designed especially for all members of the family and include the coordination of supportive services.

It should be emphasized that the majority of people do not go into a four year degree program. The important thing is to make an open entry - open exit possible. Furthermore, the performance criteria of any component in the educational system must be based on quality control for completion. The necessary level of competence should be required to complete the educational program. Lowering performance standards at any part of the system will not have the desired effect of strengthening education.

An Influence on the Educational Curriculum

It should be recognized also that the effects of this "baccalaureate degree syndrome" extend into the total educational system. Secondary educational institutions have become little universities departmentalized along subject matter lines. Many of the great things predicted for the comprehensive school were never realized. The basic dichotomy of college preparatory and vocational education has, if anything, been increased. The latest innovation, career education, has now enabled many educational institutions and educators to "get involved" with people. The dichotomy must be destroyed. The need for an integrated curriculum and institution in education is obvious, immediate, and paramount.

A vertical structure of career education could, in time, have a profound influence on the entire curriculum. New innovative ideas such as the career education model's continuous progress, learning activity packages, non-gradedness, individualized instruction, open entry - open exit, and others would take on additional meaning to counselors, parents, families and students. Many aspects of modern technology could be introduced in the curriculum. Most significant of all, those individuals for whom the present curriculum is not relevant would find educational opportunities. Going to college would mean more than merely taking the proper courses in school to score well in college entrance examinations.

Few significant changes will be made in education however, until the public school programs, colleges, and universities become recognized as an integral part of career education system. As long as it operates outside of the framework -- as an alternative, less desirable, dead ended, educational option -- the negative image will persist. The problem has been stated - the solution is a career education system which provides opportunity for all people.

Our critics, both private tax paying citizens and political delegates, are waiting in the wings for a better answer. This is emphasized by the following remarks made by Congressman Augustus Hawkins to the Western State Advisory Council at a meeting in San Diego, February 26, 1972:

> "The traditional educational system as we have known it in this country is bankrupted financially, depleted ideologically, and approaching sterility in the production of courageous and inspirational leadership to guide the system through fundamental and constructive adaptation to a rapidly changing world of new needs and broader horizons."